



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

DOCUMENTS

Diary and Memoranda of William L. Marcy, 1849-1851

FOR many years the papers of William Learned Marcy were in the possession of his heirs and were not open to historical investigators. Marcy was twice married. His first wife was Dolly Newell of Southbridge, Massachusetts, to whom he was married in September, 1812. She died in Troy, New York, on March 6, 1821, leaving two sons, William G. and Samuel. William L. Marcy's second wife was Cornelia Knowler of Albany, whom he married about 1825. Samuel Marcy married Eliza M. Humphreys. Four children were born to them; the second child, Edith, married Charles Stillman Sperry, a lieutenant in the United States Navy, who rose to the rank of rear-admiral.

The Marcy papers were originally collected by Mr. George Newell, a brother of William L. Marcy's first wife, his intention being to write a life of his distinguished brother-in-law. Owing to Mr. Newell's death the project was never carried out. The papers passed into the hands of the Knowler family and were preserved by John Knowler, a brother of William L. Marcy's second wife. He kept them at his residence near the Manhattan Club in New York City. After John Knowler's death, the papers passed into the keeping of his nephew, Benjamin Knowler, and were taken by him to Scarborough, New York. After the death of Benjamin Knowler, in 1904, the documents were sent to the wife of Rear-Admiral Charles Stillman Sperry and were kept in the vault of the War College at Newport, Rhode Island. They remained there until 1914 when Mrs. Sperry had a wooden chest and a cow-hide trunk which contained the more valuable papers sent to her at Boulder, Colorado, where she now resides with her son, Charles S. Sperry, a professor in the University of Colorado. In 1915 Mrs. Sperry and her son deposited most of these papers, as a loan, in the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress. For personal reasons they retained three diaries. Through their kindness the *Review* is allowed to publish the portions of these diaries which have general historical interest.

In addition to the Marcy documents in the Library of Congress and the diaries, Mrs. Sperry has informed me that a trunk contain-

ing contemporary newspapers and pamphlets collected by William L. Marcy is on deposit in a warehouse in Brooklyn. Mrs. Sperry also told me that a portrait of her grandfather hung for many years on the walls of the Clarendon Hotel in New York, the property of the proprietor. This she has not seen since 1888, and she is not certain that it is still in existence.

THOMAS MAITLAND MARSHALL.

[In the Marcy Papers in the Library of Congress, volume XVIII., bound at the end of the year 1850, is a memorandum, alluded to by Marcy in the Diary contributed by Professor Marshall, and bearing the title "Washington revisited". Apparently written in the spring of 1850, it is supplemented by "Further remarks on General Taylor made after his death", intended to be inserted in the memorandum preceding. It has been thought appropriate to add these two compositions to the portion of the Diary here printed.

In volume LXXVII. of the Marcy Papers in the Library of Congress are fragments of diary of the years 1831, 1833, 1835, 1836, 1839, 1843, 1844, 1849-1851, and 1857. Marcy at various places confesses to not being industrious in the matter of keeping a diary, and the sum total of all this matter, added to what Mrs. Sperry possesses, does not make anything approaching a continuous record, but still remains a series of fragments. Those in the Library of Congress relating to 1857 form something like a continuous record from March 3 to April 18 of that year, but in the main duplicate a series possessed by Mrs. Sperry, which will be presented as a second installment, in our next number. The Library fragments from 1831 to 1851, together with the portions of Mrs. Sperry's series not here extracted, relate almost entirely to personal matters, and are mostly records of Marcy's reading. Marcy was a well-educated man (A.B. Brown University 1809), and his reading was extensive and varied, though desultory. Beaumont and Fletcher, Milton and Hooker, *Hudibras* and Pope and Dryden, Thomas à Kempis and Thomas Fuller, Montesquieu, and Wordsworth's *Prelude* and *Excursion*, figure in the pages of his Diary, with critical comments which, while nowise profound nor deserving of preservation in print, are those of an attentive and appreciative reader. The comments on politics, as will be seen, were mostly written on two occasions, when leisure followed immediately upon release from laborious Cabinet posts, namely, in March, 1849, when Marcy's period of service as Secretary of War in Polk's Cabi-

net came to an end, and in March, 1857, when he ceased to be Secretary of State in the Cabinet of Pierce. It is believed that the comments on public affairs which he makes at those two periods will have a considerable interest and value to historical students.

It will be seen that Marcy was a careless writer, but it has not been deemed necessary to correct obvious errors, though small changes of punctuation, in the interest of intelligibility and uniformity, have been thought allowable. ED.]

1849, Dec. 3d. On this day assembles the *Thirty first Congress* of the U. S. and in effect now is the beginning of Genl Taylor's Administration. Though he has been in Office nine month[s], it can not be said that he has indicated clearly and responsibly the policy by which he intends his adm. shall be marked. When he was before the people for election his name and fame as a soldier awakened some enthusiasm in his favor—enough to be the cause of his Success; but it soon vanished. Two causes contributed to the sudden subsidence of the popular feeling in his favor. His military character was discovered to be in a great measure accidental and without any collateral sustaining qualities. All of him as a general is comprised in two words—*personal courage*. Of his profession he knew not more than most, and much less than some of the officers of his lineal grade, Colonel. As he had lived more than fifty years without learning much of military matters, it was not reasonable to believe that he could learn much by the experience of the favorable command which was given him in the War with Mexico. In that war he did excellently for himself and fairly well for the Country—much better than I should have anticipated if I had known him as well as I now do. I did much to give him his command and am naturally inclined to justify the judiciousness of the selection. Thus far he has shown himself destitute to a lamentable degree of the qualifications of a State[s] man; nor does it appear that he has sufficient capacity to have made one if he had had a favorable training. The shameless violation of his pledges made while he was a[i]ming at the Presidency hardly allow us in charity to regard him as an honest, yet less as an honorable, man. As his administration progresses it will probably appear more clearly what he is. Now he is considered to be in pupillage and directed, by the good luck which favored him in his military command, for he has selected or had dictated to him, a cabinet which as yet has shown no ability. There has been so much disappointment as to him and them that they will be extremely fortunate if they recover the ground they have lost. In this book I intend to note political events as they occur and make such reflections thereon as naturally and obviously arise simultaneously with their occurrence.

7th Dec. Our last news from Washington is the proceedings of yesterday rec'd by Telegraph. The house not yet organized. Of course no message yet. The trouble grows out of the slavery question, which is more threatening now than it has been at any other time.

Up to this day *13th. Decr.* we have not yet heard that a Speaker is

elected yet the complexion of the latest news leads to a hope that our next information will announce that fact. . . .¹

Dec. 15. The contest for Speaker in Congress is not yet brought to a close or was not at the date of the last advices from Washington. W. J. Brown of Ind'a came within a few votes of an Election; but a discovery was made showing that he had been tampering with the Free-soilers (D. Wilmot etc.) which reflected disgrace on both.² I thought it strange that such a man as Brown who was the least likely of any man of my acquaintance in Congress to be thought on for that situation should receive such a vote as he did after his name had been brought forward. B. naturally is a fair and upright man but the prospect of the Speakership seems to have dazzled his moral vision (probably not very strong) and led him to a course which will forever tarnish his reputation. That he did not realize the position in which he placed himself by his letter to Wilmot is very certain. I regret the occurrence on account of its effect upon the character of B. but still more for the effect it is likely to have on the general interests of the democratic party. It will I fear tend to aggravate the feeling of alienation between the north and South, not only generally but among democrats. The free-soilers will lose by the steps. So far it is well.

1850, May 11. It is very strange that after such a firm resolve to continue my memoranda I should have omitted any entry in this book for nearly five months. For nearly two months previous to my departure for Washington I was employed as my Diary will show. Tho I read some every day it was casual reading and nothing occurred worth a more extended notice than that made in my Journal. About the middle of February I left home for W. where I remained until towards the first of May. I promised myself when I left home that I would note the reflections which arose in my mind on revisiting W. and accompany them with observations on the men and the events which might fall under my particular notice. The caption of the *Remarks* I have fixed on, which is "*Washington revisited*", and as yet I have done nothing more towards executing my resolution. Perhaps I never shall.³ It will be a shame to me if I do not. My object in going to W. was to assist Mr. J. H. C. in preparing some arguments to be laid before the Com'rs on Mexican claims.⁴ This engagement took up most of the time I spent there. I did not however intermit my usual course of desultory reading. . . .

¹ The Democrats had nominated Howell Cobb of Georgia, the Whigs Robert C. Winthrop of Massachusetts. After the thirty-ninth ballot Winthrop withdrew from the contest. W. J. Brown of Indiana, who from the thirty-second ballot on had received the largest number of Democratic votes, on the fortieth (December 12) received 112 votes, only two less than the number necessary for a choice.

² Brown's letter to Wilmot, December 10, promising that if elected Speaker he would constitute the committees on the District of Columbia, on Territories, and on the Judiciary, in such manner as would be satisfactory to Wilmot and his friends, is in the *Congressional Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., p. 22.

³ The fragment found among Marcy's papers, bearing the title named, is printed at the end of this section of the Diary.

⁴ Commissioners appointed under arts. XIV. and XV. of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Moore, *International Arbitrations*, pp. 1248-1286. "Mr. J. H. C." was apparently J. H. Caustin, who was counsel for many of the claimants.

Congress adjourned on 30. Sept. after a boisterous session of ten months. We have experienced the greatest political storm that ever fell upon the country and it will be an epoch in our history. Whether it is entirely passed I know not. Tho' the waves are yet tossing about I hope—I believe the agitating cause is removed. Clay and Webster have acted like patriots in this crisis and as each is near the end of his political career it may be regarded as the crowning act of their pol. life. The slavery agitation I hope is now and forever put to rest. Its recent effects upon the old party organization are worthy of consideration and ought to be traced with more fullness and particularity than I propose to do it—perhaps more so than I am able to trace them. The federalists—whigs—or whatever they are called or call themselves have been out of power in the general govt since 1801, most of the time. Their ascendancy whenever it has happened has been the result of accidental causes. It was natural in their situation that they should resort to expedients in order to prevail over their opponents; this they have done whenever a tempting occasion offered for nearly a half of a century. The southern states being mostly democratic their peculiar institution—slavery—was naturally by their political adversaries—the federalists—looked upon with disfavor. Some of the federalists rushed into the arms of abolition but as a party they stopped short of that extreme, but they ever entertained strong oppugnation to slavery and committed some aggressions on the institution. Their course secured to their party the benefit of the anti-slavery feeling in the free states—but they so adroitly managed the matter as to secure the cooperation of the opponents of the democracy in the slave states.

Acting as I fully believe under a resentful feeling arising from disappointment in failing to be nominated for Prest. in 1844, Mr. V. B.⁵ took stronger ground than even the federalists on the slavery questions which arose or were likely to arise in consequence of Mexican territorial acquisitions and thereby brought confusion and defeat upon the democratic party in this state and I think I am warranted to say in the Union. The Whigs greatly rejoiced at our divisions as well they might for they reaped a rich harvest by it.

The slavery agitation was just the thing that scheming politicians thought a source of popularity. Those of this character among the Whigs were determined to avail themselves of it and labored to their utmost to prevent the settlement of the disturbing questions which had arisen on this subject. The democrats generally went for the settlement, so did a part of the whigs.

Enough of them united with the democrats to secure the passage of the several compromise bills. The settlement of these is generally well received by the democratic party in the free states where the attempt to organize a freesoil party had failed; but it is likely to lay the foundation of a serious division among the whigs. In this state the continuance of the agitation was considered as of vital importance because it would be an obstacle to the Union of the democratic party—a measure undertaken last year and now in the progress of successful completion.

Senator Seward with a majority of the whig members of congress from this state opposed the compromise bills but thirteen of our delegates supported them and President Fillmore approved the bills and it is

⁵ Van Buren.

understood that he and his cabinet urged their passage. When the whig convention met last week⁶ it appeared there was, as it was reasonable to expect there would be, an embarrassing question before it. Fillmore and his friends in this state, which I shall call the whig adm'n, wished to have their course endorsed by the convention and if that could not be done, and as they were likely to be in the minority the[y] feared it could not, they wished the proceedings should be such as should not censure directly or impliedly the course they had taken. On the other hand Seward and Sixteen whig M. C. from this state had persisted in an ultra course on the slavery questions and their political position was perilous unless the party here stood by them. Their friends were determined to have them endorsed by the convention but this could not be done without an implied censure of the adm. party and the course of Prest. F. The Seward party had the power to carry out their policy and they did so after refusing what they ought to have regarded as a fair compromise. On the passage of resolutions distinctly approving the course of Mr. S. the Chairman of the Con[vention] Mr. Granger⁷ with several other Delegates—about forty in number—seceded, organized, proposed the call of another Whig State convention of the friends of the administration and opponents of Seward and published an address setting forth the grounds of their secession. This convention is to assemble at Utica in 17. Oct. So the matter stands at this date 2. Oct.

Oct. 24th. Though a long time has passed since I annotated I will first speak of what relates to my former closing remarks. The seceders convention met on the 17. inst. They did not, as I anticipated they would not, make a separate ticket but in fact concurred in that made at Syracuse. They have rather laid the foundation of a future division in the whig party than made one at this time. They have prepared to block the game of Seward and it appears to me they have effectually done it. By inaction only can S. and his friends avoid defeat and overthrow in this state. I think that the Whigs will not only not be injured in the approaching election by the cou[r]se of the Seceders or administration portion of them but probably come out in greater strength than if there had been not scessn among them. The ticket seems to be acceptable to both sections; particularly the candidate for Gov'r⁸ who is almost the only man on whom both sections would have cordially united. In truth he is a strong candidate. He is in favor with the Antirenters and has been adopted by them. Tho he in a very cautious and guarded manner refuses to accept their nomination, I think his refusal is so qualified as not to drive them from his support. He also stands well with the business and moneyed men in N. Y. Weed and Seward have for years been skilfully manoeuvring for the Irish votes and have succeeded quite well in their measures; undoubtedly a larger number of that class will go with the Whigs at the next election than hitherto. Mr. H. when in Congress showed somewhat of the demagogue in moving an appropriation of \$500,000, for the relief of Ireland

⁶ The Whig state convention had met at Syracuse on September 27. Barnes, *Thurlow Weed*, II. 186-187.

⁷ Francis Granger, postmaster-general under Harrison, leader of the "Silver Grays".

⁸ Washington Hunt.

some years ago when that country was in a partial state of starvation.⁹ Congress had no constitutional right to grant such relief yet pending an election it would not do to agitate that question. In consequence of that movement Mr. H. will find favor with the Irish voters to a greater extent than any other candidate that could have been selected from the Whigs.

Another matter will strengthen the whig cause in this state at the approaching Election—the excitement which has been got up on the Fugitive Slave Law. The freesoilers of our party go into this measure of agitation. Tho the whigs were in power when the law was passed, in this state they generally denounce it and it is enlisting considerable opposition, and they are ingeniously availing themselves of it to benefit their cause. The seceding section are however at war with them on this subject and to some extent that fact will neutralise the effects of the excitement. The Whigs are in my opinion in a far better state of organization than the democrats in this state and all things considered have the best chance for success. The abolitionists who are pretty numerous will generally vote the whig ticket. The whigs will have less confusion on the local tickets than I expected—perhaps less than the democrats, for in the ranks of the latter there yet remains considerable diversity of opinion and each section have evinced great anxiety to secure candidates of their own peculiar sentiments. The pressure of the election is bringing the party somewhat together yet there is and will be as much rankling [wrangling?] among them as among the whigs—So I fear the result of the coming election will show. . . .

Nov. 3, 50. Since the last entry was made—more than a week ago—I have been engaged in business in relation to the C. bank,¹⁰ and it is yet unfinished. My reading has been less in quantity and perhaps more disultory than usual. No particular subject has engaged my attention. Though an election is at hand I have written nothing for publication or rather nothing that has been published. There is a great deal of cross firing in this contest, and it is difficult to avoid topics that may do injury in some quarters. It is so difficult to determine what to say that I have said nothing.

The confusion in the Whig ranks is more apparent than it was ten days ago. There is among the two sections deep seated hostility which is partially kept under for the present but it will break forth after the election, be the result what it may. In the ranks of the dem. party there is discontent but less of it now than among their opponents. I doubt our success but have better hopes than I had a week ago. The great union Meeting held about one week since in Castle garden¹¹ was an important movement for the well-being of the country and what is of less importance, yet it is important, to the dem. party. It has struck a severe, if not a fatal blow, to two mischievous factions—*abolitionists* and *anti-renters*.

⁹ Bill introduced by Hunt, February 10, 1847. *Cong. Globe*, 29 Cong., 2 sess., p. 377.

¹⁰ The Canal Bank of Albany, then in the hands of a receiver by reason of speculations.

¹¹ A "union meeting" held in Castle Garden, New York City. It was a combination of Democrats and administration Whigs, opposing Seward and Weed and calling for vigorous enforcement of the fugitive slave law.

The whigs being as a general thing more unscrupulous than democrats have heretofore so manoeuvred as to profit more than their opponents by all irregular action in political affairs. The feeling in N. Y. is strong against both abolitionism and anti-rentism and was embodied and uttered in a potential voice by the vast assemblage at C. Garden. There is as things now appear a fair chance that the Whig candidate for Gov'r (Hunt) may lose in N. Y. nearly as many whig votes as he will get dem. votes in the antirent counties. If so the game which has been plaid in his behalf for the antirent votes will not prove to have been a wise one and certainly it is not an honest one. Three day[s] will put an end to all speculation. . . .

Nov. 10. It is just one week since I made the last entry in this book. During that week a state election has taken place,—an election of more than usual importance. Its exact result is not yet ascertained. Whether Seymour, Dem., or Hunt, Whig, is elected is yet left in uncertainty.¹² The legislature is whig. This will secure to that party a whig Senator in Congress in the place of D. S. Dickinson who has nobly done his duty in the Senate of the U. S. A combination of causes has led to this result. The division in the dem. party which two years ago clave it into two nearly equal parts though partially healed yet disturbs its action. The relicts of that feud still linger in its system and manifested itself in respect to the assembly more obvi[ously] than in any other way. A great number who were prominent in the 'barnburner' faction were determined that Dickinson should not be returned to the U. S. [Senate] and the more rabid among them were in favor of sending J. V. B.¹³ in his place, and if they could not do that preferred the election of a whig to the reelection of Dickinson. J. V. B. was justly obnoxious to the true democrats as Dickinson was to the leaders of the faction of barnburners. Our success was periled by the disproportionate number of Freesoilers on the local tickets particularly for members of the assembly.

In regard to members of congress we have done better. The delegation is divided between the Dem. and Whigs—Seventeen of each. In these there is also a subdivision on both sides—Union Whigs and Free-soil Whigs, national dem. and free soil democrats. The dem. have gained fifteen members. In the present congress we have but two. Indeed correctly speaking but one; for P. King¹⁴ is not in truth a democrat; he is in action an abolitionist and would break up the union for the sake of a few run away negros. Yet neither he or J. V. B. care for negros. They are both playing an unpatriotic political game. They are not troubled with principles and are in my opinion guided by purely personal views.

Tho we may lose our Gov. and one other candidate on the state ticket the result shows that the state is really democratic.

Hunt was the only man in the whig party who would [have] stood any chance for an election. The two factions in the party which has now become a very serious affair were united on him, but I doubt if any other could have been found on whom they would have united. Hunt

¹² The election was very close, and for some time in doubt. Hunt received 214,614 votes; Horatio Seymour, the Democratic candidate, 214,352.

¹³ John Van Buren. The senator finally chosen was Hamilton Fish.

¹⁴ Preston King, representative 1843-1847, 1849-1853; senator 1857-1863.

also got a large Irish vote by his motion in Congress to appropriate \$500,000, to relieve Ireland from starvation. It was so contrived that he got the antirent vote and yet his letter to them was so ingeniously worded that the opponents of the faction were satisfied with his position. Scarcely any other man could have avoided Scilla and Charybdis as he has.

Tho the free soilers will yet give the dem. further trouble it will be less serious than that which now impends over the Whig party. Seward's demagogism will yet for a long time trouble them. The Whig party will no longer submit to his machinations and his friends will not consent to let him fall down to his proper position.

It looks to me as if something like the reorgination [reorganization] of political parties was likely to take place in this state and indeed throughout the whole country. More of this hereafter. . . .

Christmas, 25 Dec. 1850. As the year approaches its close I am naturally let to reflect upon the manner in which I have spent [it]. I cannot charge myself with down-right idleness yet it is most true that I have very little reason to be satisfied with what I have done in it.

Though I have not done much that I ought not to have done I cannot clear myself from the charge of sins of omission. The country has been in a crisis, and I ought to have been more active in efforts to give a right direction to public sentiment. I ought to have found leisure to employ my pen in sustaining the course which has been pursued to extricate us from our difficulties. As these measures had my entire approbation I ought to have done more than I have to secure for them the public approval. Tho my life has been essentially that of a public man I have a disrelish for public affairs. . . . I charge myself with remissness in not having completed my notes on "Washington Revisited". I promise myself that I will resume that subject. Another visit to W— which I shall make in a few days will enable me to do better justice to it than otherwise I could. I shall be very much hurried until my departure and probably shall not annotate again until after my return in this book—but I may—I ought to make *memmoranda* and so I will.

I left Albany for Washington on the 6th day of Jany. 1851, and arrived at home on the 1st. of May. I did not as I promised above make any memmoranda yet I think I am better able than I was to continue my remarks on "*Washington revisited*". Yet I fear that my time is to be much taken up for the next two months.

May 13th, 1851. I arrived at home from Washn. after an absence of nearly four months on the 1st inst. I ought to have renewed at once my annotations. An ou[t]line of what I did and saw at Washn. in this last visit would require a long *note*. I do not make it because I mean to employ my first leisure in finishing my "Washington revisited" which I intend shall embrace observations on men and things as they appeared to me in my two visits. I will barely say here that I had on the last excursion a very pleasant time. In one respect it was much better than the visit of the former year. It was much more profitable. My visit to Annapolis was also a very pleasant one. The thread of my remarks I will take up at the time of my arrival at home on the first of May. I pass over domestic affairs.

A new phase has been given to our State politics by the breaking up of the Legislature. The getting up of the nine Million

Law¹⁵ was undoubtedly a political manoeuvre. The whigs resorted to it to make capital. Whether they will succeed or not is yet an event in the uncertain future. Opposition to the project was just, on principle and policy. All allowable means should have been resorted to for defeating it but I doubted from the first and now still more doubt whether the resignation of the democratic senators was a wise course. It could never have been certain in the minds of the sagacious that such a step was sure to defeat it. If there was a probability that the whig strength in the senate would be increased by it the course should not have been adopted. Though the election has not yet taken place there seems to be no doubt that the whigs will carry three or four of the vacated districts.¹⁶ This will be a triumph which will worsen our condition in the next general election. As an issue extended to the whole state it will not be a bad one for the democratic party, yet on such an issue I do not think it will be as well off as it would have been if it had stood on the old ground. As things were before this new issue the democrats were gradually and slowly getting together while the whigs were getting asunder. The new state of things accelerates the union of the former but it arrests and may result in composing the increasing divisions of the latter. As things were one would have been improving in their internal condition and the other worsening. In this aspect of the case I should prefer not to have the experiment tried. Before this new phase was given to our politics the main issue would have been the compromise measures. This was a good issue, those who supported it stand on old democratic ground. The freesoil democrats saw and felt the necessity of getting on to it. The only choice before them was to get back into that position or to join the freesoil whigs under the lead of Seward and Weed, there to occupy a subordinate position and become a component part of a sectional party which could never be a national party. There [their] success, if by possibility it could extend through the free state[s] or the greater part of them, inevitably involved the disruption of the union. There is too much patriotism and sagacity in the mass of the democratic party and if I am not mistaken in the mass of those who were withdrawn from the support of Gen. Cass in 1848 to permit themselves to unite their political destiny with such an organization. They would not have followed infatuated—if such leaders could be found—to this extent. The nature of this issue was exerting a powerful influence in bringing democrats together.

But this issue was not less potent in its operation upon the ranks of the whigs in this state. While it was bringing democrats on to there [their] old platform it was removing the whigs from theirs. As a popular expedient they as a party had professed the freesoil doctrine. The more patriotic portion of them when they saw, and all but the blind could not but see, that the practical effect of that doctrine would put an end to the union, first hesitated and then renounced it. Mr. Fill-

¹⁵ An act authorizing a loan of \$9,000,000 for the enlargement of the Erie Canal. Eleven Democratic senators resigned their seats in order to break a quorum, but in vain. Henry B. Stanton, *Random Recollections* (second ed., New York, 1886), p. 83; Hutchins, *Civil List* (Albany, 1865), p. 414. The act was subsequently declared unconstitutional.

¹⁶ They in fact carried six.

more had been freesoil even to the verge of rank abolition but when placed at the head of the federal govt. by the death—and so far as respects the well-being of the country, the fortunate death—of Genl. Taylor, he at once saw the necessity of receding from his former ground; he at once favored the compromise measures and organized his administration in such a manner as to carry them into effect. This course, inevitable as it was, necessarily produced a division in the whig ranks in all the states where freesoilism had taken root. This division had become, and I hope notwithstanding the new issue, will continue to be a serious affair for the whigs in the State. Though now a majority of that party still cling to freesoilism, there are numerous secessions from it and much wavering among those who still permit that banner to float over their heads.

The leading whigs at Albany, mostly officials and hostile to Mr. Fillmore's administration, seeing their ranks unsteady no doubt got up the new issue in the reasonable expectation that it would tend to hold their followers together and probably prevent their defeat at the next state election. If they succeed in this expectation they will have given a most signal proof of their political dexterity. In any event they have got a better position than they had before and of course the democratic party are less sure of an approaching triumph than they would have been. Still I think as it is the prospect for their success is very promising.

WASHINGTON REVISITED

I am under engagements to myself to write out my observations and reflections on visiting W. in the winter of 1850. This visit was made at the end of one year from the time I retired from the War Dept. at the end of President Polk's adm'n and consequently after Genl. Taylor had occupied the Presidential chair for that space of time. Every thing so far as respected the city wore the same aspects as when I left it in 1849. In appearance there was no external change. I then saw many, as I thought, most of the old faces I was wont to see there. New faces it is true were abundant, but that is ever the case in Washington. While a resident there I scarcely ever saw Congress in session, tho my acquaintance with the members was extensive and those who were most frequently at the war office were still in that body or were brought there by business or curiosity. The familiar aspect of the place and the presence of so many whom I was accustomed to meet daily tended to impress me with a belief that my absence had been but for a brief period—much briefer than it had in reality been.

My attention was naturally at first directed to the men composing the new administration and to the positions they occupied with reference to congress and the country. With most of the men called in to the cabinet I had had some previous acquaintance and had formed higher expectations in regard to them as men of talents and as statesmen than they have justified.

Of General Taylor little was known previous to his election except what regarded his military character. To the view of the country his real character was surrounded by a halo of glory which prevented it from being seen in its true proportions. He had been a successful Genl in his Mexican campaigns and was therefore reputed to be a great one.

His first encounter with the enemy was attended with a result as brilliant as it was unexpected, and had the effect of introducing his name to public notice as a candidate for President. He was evidently captivated with the suggestion and the natural consequence was that those who favored it and there were enough such about him secured his confidence and thereby obtained undue control over him, in relation to every thing connected with his advancement to the Presidency. They represented him as possessed of civil qualifications to which he had but slight pretensions and ascribed to him much more distinguished abilities as a military commander than he actually possessed. They filled his mind with false notions in regard to himself.

I thought well of him as a General but never for a moment regarded him as a great one. His knowledge of military affairs beyond the details in which his life had been spent, was very limited. Of the art of war, of strategy, of skilful arrangements, of a capacity to adapt his operations to meet emergencies as they arise and when they arise—of all the higher properties of a skillful commander in the field I now and at all times regarded him as uncommonly deficient. But he was attentive to the duties of his command and brought a common sense judgment to bear on all subjects to the extent of his information. He was brave to a degree which commands admiration and remarkably firm in his purposes. His bravery and the steadiness of purpose are the summary of his high qualities as a commanding officer. He was not very active, but was a prudent officer—singularly careful in regard to expenditures, so much so as to neglect to furnish himself with the information which he ought to have procured of the situation and movements of the enemy.

Tho very brave he lacked enterprise, and his prudence was without resource; he made a judicious use of what was put into his hands but wholly wanted the talent to create the means of secure success. With so many deficiencies indispensably necessary to constitute the highest order of commanders it is remarkable that he should have secured to himself, as unquestionably he did, in an uncommon degree the confidence in [of] the officers and soldiers under him. His bravery undoubtedly operated like a charm upon them; this impression was deepened by a conviction that his judgment was sound and his purposes well matured and would be steadily pursued. In another respect he stood above those with whom he was likely to be compared. He had a good discernment of the merits of those under him and in assigning duties to them he seems to have laid aside all personal feelings (from which he was not free) and in this way made the best use of the materials in his hands. There was in this respect an approach to magnanimity in his military conduct of which he has not yet given any evidence in his civil career.

But my object in speaking here of Genl Taylor is to present my views of him in his position as President to which this view of his character as General is perhaps an allowable introduction.

No man in the country could have been found with whose name the Presidency could have been connected by any fortunate concurrence of circumstances more ignorant of public men or more unacquainted with public affairs than Genl Taylor. I think he has stated that he had never voted at a presidential election; I know he has said that until after he was elected President he had never seen one of the men selected for his cabinet, nor but one of the members of his predecessors cabinet includ-

ing Mr Polk himself. This want of knowledge of public men—this abstinence from participation in public affairs, was certainly no matter to boast of by one who had been elevated to the chief Majesty [magistracy] of this great republic, and who had given, amidst profuse expressions to the contrary, a fixed determination to do what he could to secure that exalted station.

Talents of a high order had not been generally conceded to him, nor did any but mere electioneers ascribe them to him; but it was supposed that he had considerable discernment in judging of men, a native sagacity which would enable him to avail himself in a creditable way of the suggestions of others with more experience and better information than he could pretend to have. He had the general reputation of firmness carried as many believed to the faulty extreme of stubbornness. This acknowledged steadfastness united to something more than a common degree of sagacity, it was believed, would carry him thro the arduous duties of his new station in a manner creditable to himself and useful to the country. This belief was the more readily adopted from the fact that two of our Presidents most eminent for high civil qualifications were distinguished Generals. The adoption of such an inference arose it is true from a very superficial view of the character of the several men. Washington, Jackson and Taylor had scarcely any similarity in the features of their characters and many points of striking contrast. Among the generality of the people enough was not known of Genl Taylor to enable them to make the discrimination, and in this uncertainty of what he was there was room to hope he might sustain a comparison with one or the other. It was not until after the test had been applied that the delusiveness of this hope became manifest. It was not alone to the captivating effects of military glory among our people, more infectious and perhaps more excusable immediately after a successful war than at any other time—but to this was added a puerile weakness always too prevalent, that General Taylor was indebted for the enviable civil position he now occupies. So strange is it that what implied a disqualification was presented in his case and accepted to some extent as a positive recommendation and to it more than to his military fame or certainly in conjunction with it was he probably indebted for his success. He was not and never had been a politician; he was fettered with no strong political ties—bound to no system of measures, and could not be induced to make any thing like a profession to any distinct political creed.

At first he announced himself no partizan and sought elevation irrespective of either of the great political parties into which the country was divided. While in this position many of each party espoused his cause; but either by his own sagacity or by the aid of personal friends, most probably the latter, he at length discovered that the ground he occupied was untenable. He was induced to change it so far as to enable him to secure the support of one of these parties. It was fortunate for him that the whigs to whom probably he was the most inclined were the most easily accommodated. In order to be endorsed by their nomination and to receive their general support he acknowledged himself a whig—but a moderate one—professed to be most liberal in his views and so far descended to particulars as to put forth solemn and reiterated pledges that no man should be removed from office on account of his political sentiments; that he had no friends to reward, no

enemies to punish. Considering these sentiments as emanations from a frank honest mind many were led into a belief that with such a man at the head of the government the country would see what is impracticable in a free government—"proscription proscribed,"—a man elevated to power and wielding a vast patronage but making no marked discrimination between those who supported and those who opposed. The improbability of the thing should have made it incredible, except to those who are so weak as to believe in the continuance of miracles. The most charitable view which can be taken of Genl Taylor's conduct in this respect is to assume that he was so utterly destitute of political experience that he intended to do what he promised. Such a defence is a poor compliment to his sagacity—but any other would be fatal to his integrity.

The belief that these pledges were made in sincerity and by a man sufficiently self-willed to carry them out was more extensively entertained than experienced politicians would have imagined and produced more effect than was anticipated. It retained under his standard, first raised as that of a no-party candidate, many of the democrats who then resorted to it and did not leave it when he made his advance towards the whig party. Many who had become disgusted with the *ascorbity of party politics*, and believed that it might be laid aside in the management of public concerns in a popular government, fancied they saw in Genl Taylor a candidate who would carry out their fanciful theory of administration. In this way he secured quite an accession of strength from the democratic party, without creating a corresponding [counterbalancing]¹⁷ defection from the whigs. His no-party professions at first created considerable distrust among the whigs who remembered with suspicion the conduct of Tyler but his approaches towards them had in a great measure removed it. This step gave them a view of his character on which they confidently built their hope, that if he was not already, he could soon be made to be what they wished to have him; it showed them that they had not much to fear from his imagined steadfastness of mind—that his principles could be easily made to accommodate themselves to the exigencies in which he might be placed. They discovered that he had one qualification or rather property necessary to their success which they did not hope to find in any other candidate. As a politician they could give him a *camelian hue* which would make him appear in a light acceptable to their party in every section of the Union,—to the north and the south—in the slave-holding and in the free states. As he had not been scrupulous in making or modifying his professions, they did not fear that he would interpose to detect deceptions which they might deem it expedient to practice by giving him a character suited to the varying view of a party somewhat distracted with contrariant sentiments.

Though he was represented in the free states as holding sentiments not palatable to the south, he was a slave holder and the South thought he could be held in regard to the much agitated question of slavery true to their interest because he was then known to be a man of singularly strong attachments to his own. The affairs of the whig party were in a conjuncture which required for their success a very peculiar candidate

¹⁷ The word "counterbalancing" is written above "corresponding" in the manuscript.

and in the person of Genl Taylor they found just such a one as was needed. With him they succeeded and they could not probably have done so with any others. (See further remarks made after the Death of Genl T—.)

On the 5th of March 1849, he was inaugurated. His Inauguration address showed that he was not then entirely unmindful of what he had said before the election; but the selection of his cabinet gave warning that he was passing into an oblivious state in respect to his public pledges. The members of it were all whigs and scarcely one of the moderate species. Those in the most influential position were the most exceptionable. The Secretary of State¹⁸ is usually considered in our government the head of the cabinet and the person selected for that office had as was then generally conceded the requisite talents for that situation. He had been long in public life, but in one position—the senate of the U States—and his talents had only been tried in one line—opposition. A man may be able as an opponent who is quite incompetent to lead or support. To find fault is much easier than to sustain. Those who best knew Mr. Clayton expressed doubts of his fitness for the station to which he had been assigned; these doubts were not confined to democrats but prevailed to a considerable extent among the whigs. His early habits in one respect had been bad. Though I thought as many others did that he had reclaimed himself I soon learned that this was a mistake. It is no longer a questionable matter that the indulgence referred to had not been intermitted and is now carried to a disqualifying extent. It has probably affected his nervous system and is one of the assigned causes of his failure to answer the general expectation in regard to the discharge of his duties as Secretary of State.

His political friends did not abstain from alluding to another trait of character derogatory in private life and intolerable in a public man—I mean an unreliableness—a defective integrity—a want of scrupulousness in regard to promises and in raising expectations without a settled intention to gratify them. Perhaps to characterise this fault as a want of integrity might be too expressive and yet it is but little short of it. When a man says a thing known to be within his power shall be done his character ought to be such as to give an assurance that it will be done and to leave no room for distressing doubts and uncertainty as to the result. On whig authority I am warranted in saying that such is not the case in respect to Mr. C. By a great many of his own party who have had opportunities of forming opinions from actual experience he is not regarded or spoken of as a *reliable* man.

In managing our foreign affairs he has shown an inadequate knowledge of them and a want of skill. He has utterly failed to vindicate the claim heretofore asserted by his friends and conceded by his opponents as a man of eminent talents. It was unfortunate for him to be forced as would necessarily be the case into a comparison with his able and accomplished predecessor.¹⁹ He has neither the abilities, the character or the address to sustain it. This juxtaposition has brought clearly into public view the signal merits and brilliant official success of the one and the no less noticeable demerits and disreputable failure of the other. The contrast is singularly disparaging to the present incumbent.

¹⁸ John M. Clayton of Delaware.

¹⁹ James Buchanan.

While I was in Washington I heard much said by the whigs—by leading members of the party and by the real friends of Genl Taylor—two classes not to be confounded—about a change in the cabinet and no change was suggested which did not contemplate the retirement of the Secretary of State. The low estimation in which the administration was held even among the great body of whigs was in no inconsiderable degree ascribed to the disappointed expectations of the public in regard to the Secretary of State and the bungling mismanagement of his Department.

The other members of the Cabinet claim a passing notice. The Secretary of the Treasury²⁰ has greatly fallen below public expectation. He had and from all I can now learn deserved to have a high reputation in his profession as a lawyer. Among the members of the bar in his state, Penna, now engaged in the practise he was by general consent placed in the first rank and many assigned him the head of it. The law had engrossed his attention and tho his uniform attachment had been to the whig or federal party he had not been an active politician. In going into the Cabinet he entered upon a new scene for which it now appears he was not well fitted. His position called for the exercise of phenomenal [phenomenal] talents: as yet he has given no evidence that he possesses them in more than an ordinary degree. I do not think there has been much blundering but some miscalculation. No one has yet been satisfied how he came to the conclusion which he authorised to be promulgated to the public in advance of his annual report that there would be a deficit of Sixteen millions in the revenues. There does not appear to have been vigor or watchfulness in the management of the Treasury department under him. He is not at home in it and it would have been far better for his reputation had he never entered it.

The Secretary of the Interior²¹ is a far more conspicuous figure in the group. He is a well-trained politician of the genuine whig stamp; one who pushes forward to his ends unscrupulous of the means, more bold than sagacious;—all partizan and no patriot. The features of his character are hard. By the proscriptive course he pursued for the short time he was a member of the Harrison Cabinet²² he acquired the *sobriquet* of the Butcher. As Genl Taylor had made so many professions of no party policy and as many well meaning but miscalculating men had aided his election from an honest belief that under him political asperities would be soothed the selection of Ewing was a matter of surprise and regret. To another class not undeserving of their approaching fate it caused the shiverings of horror. In the struggles for political ascendancy the most active members of all parties approve of the doctrine that to the victors belong the spoils.²³ At the moment of triumph the successful call loudly for its unsparing application. After their ravenous appetite for office is gratified and they are comfortably

²⁰ William M. Meredith.

²¹ Thomas Ewing of Ohio.

²² Ewing was Secretary of the Treasury from March 5 to September 13, 1841. See *American Historical Review*, XVIII, 97–112.

²³ A repetition of the phrase, now become classical, used by Marcy, with reference to the politicians of New York, in the debate in executive session of the Senate, January 24 or 25, 1832. "They see nothing wrong in the rule, that to the victor belong the spoils of the enemy". *Register of Debates*, VIII. 1325.

provided for an entire change of views on this subject takes place. They then think there is something harsh and even horrible in the maxim. In the change from the pursuit to the possession of office a mighty revolution is wrought in the minds of a large part of the incumbents. The prospective advent of a moderate or no-party candidate to a position which controls patronage is a matter of great joy with them; it relaxes their political nerves. They become at first neutral in action, and ultimately treacherous in conduct to the party to which they are indebted for their official situation. Though this meanspiritedness is far from being general or even common it is extensive, and many of those who maintain their political integrity in such a crisis are deeply infected with a hope that they shall be spared. If they do not vociferously condemn the maxim which I have mentioned they do not like to hear it announced.

The class of office holders here described, indebted for their situations to the democratic party and to the political application of the maxim now so disrelished, did not much regret the defeat of the democratic candidate and the success of Genl Taylor; but the selection of Ewing startled them from their repose of fancied security. They however still hoped as did many others who had no direct personal interest in the matter that Genl Taylor would be true to himself and pursue an unproscriptive course to which he was in honor and honesty bound by so many and so often repeated pledges. Amid much that proved the contrary they still clung to the hope that there was something in the character of the old Hero as he was called which justified the boast that "General Taylor never surrenders", but how little foundation there was for this hope and how utterly fallacious it was will more clearly appear when the review of the cabinet is finished. The department over which Mr E. was selected to preside was newly established. It was the unwise measure adopted during Mr Polk's administration. It is due to his memory and fame that he neither favored or approved it.²⁴ As much can be said for all except one of his cabinet.²⁵ The bill creating the department unexpectedly passed and came to him for his signature in the last hour of his executive existence. If he had had even a few hours to reflect on it after he perceived its character I am quite sure he would not have given it his official sanction and as it was, immediately after he had signed it he said to the Secretary who had favored and indeed procured the passage of the law that "it was the worst bill he had ever signed". It would lead to an unallowable digression to detail here the objections to this unwise and antidemocratic measure. It was not fortunate, unless it should prove so with reference to its repeal, that such a man as Mr. E was called to carry the act into execution. It was a measure, executed in any way, which must have led to undue concentration of executive power and he above almost any other one that could have been selected was better fitted to develop and give prominence to this dangerous feature. The immediate mischief has been an immense drain from the Treasury—and more to follow.

²⁴ Confirmed by Polk's *Diary*, IV. 371-372.

²⁵ The one exception was of course Robert J. Walker, secretary of the treasury, who drafted the measure. H. B. Learned, "The Establishment of the Secretaryship of the Interior", *American Historical Review*, XVI. 766-768.

The indulgence of his proscriptive propensity has caused the removal of those in the several bureaus who were acquainted with the course of business and the character of the unfounded claims against the government which were pending before them or had been overruled. Many rejected claims have been represented²⁶ and admitted; old ones awaked from the slumber of years, new ones conjured up, and both have met with favor beyond their merits. It seems as if political antagonism in this department had been carried not only to men but to things; that claims were considered just because they had been rejected by the preceding administration. Mr. E. is unquestionably a man of considerable talents and considerable distinction as a Lawyer, incapacity cannot therefore be received as an excuse for the abuses of power in his department. The course pursued by him and those under him can be explained in no other way than by supposing him to act on the mistaken policy that popularity is to be obtained by opening the door of the Treasury to every one who knocks at it. Such a man is not fit to have been imposed upon such a President as Genl Taylor—a president who had not the capacity if he can be presumed to have the disposition to look after and controll him. The Secretary of the Interior, admitted to be the ablest among the Septemvirs who surround the Presidential Effegy, is also the most ponderous and has contributed more than any of his coadjutors to sink the administration.

(Further remarks on Genl. Taylor made after his death to be inserted on the 3d page of the 3 sheet [p. 458, above].)

On the 9th of July the country was astounded by the announcement of Genl. Taylor's death. For this event the public mind was not prepared; scarcely had any notice gone forth of his illness. Public sympathy was deeply moved and the bereavement regarded with very general sorrow. His administration was excessively unpopular but it had not yet become extensively odious. There was still a hope extensively indulged that it would yet recover the ground it had lost. Many—very many—still clung to their first favorable opinion of the President, believing that he had been overruled by his cabinet and that ere long he would understand its true character and either change it or assume a mastery over it which would vindicate the character they had conceived him to possess. The people generally when they reflected upon the elevated statesman so suddenly removed from them viewed him in the light he was [in] when first elected; the cloud which had settled over him since his administration first began instantly disappeared; the brilliancy of his military achievements was thrown around him and nothing but the success and achievements of the brave and successful soldier was seen, felt or talked of. The national mourning [was] general and sincere; the language of panegyrick arose to extravagance. Much was said in praise of the statesman, but the public eye rested mainly on the soldier. Eulogies are usually indiscriminating and in this case they were peculiarly so. Strict impartial military criticism has not yet undertaken to pass in review his achievements but when it does so I think it will not give him a more elevated position than that I have assigned to him in my remarks made before his death.

Though eminently successful in his military career it can hardly be

²⁶ *I. e.*, presented again.

said he deserved success. Where a general for want of skill gets into difficulty that fact ought I think to detract something from his merit in extricating himself from it. Such was the case in relation to the battle[s] of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. Genl Taylor's main depot was at Point Isabel: here he had a vast accumulation of arms, provisions and munitions of war. If they had have been lost his operation for the season would have been entirely arrested; if they had fallen into the hands of the enemy who much needed them they would have been greatly strengthened and would have been thereby enabled to protract the war. This depot in every way so important was left without any thing which can be called a guard; it was distant from the army *twenty seven* miles—and what was worse than all it was accessible to the enemy. Why they did not cross the *Rio grande* near its mouth and capture it no one can tell. They might without meeting with any considerable resistance,—without any hazard have possessed themselves of it before Genl Taylor would have known it—certainly before he could have sent it any protection. He did not pretend to have known the strength of the enemy or any of their movements until they were discovered on the east side of the Rio Grande and had captured Capt Thornton and his party. Instead of crossing above Fort Brown had they crossed below and dashed on our Depot it must have fallen into their hand with the immense [amount] of property is contained.